

## Shared Stories and Religious Rhetoric: R. Judah the Pious, Peter the Chanter and a Drought

Elisheva Baumgarten

Department of Jewish History and Gender Studies Program,  
Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel  
\*E-mail: [elisheva.baumgarten@biu.ac.il](mailto:elisheva.baumgarten@biu.ac.il)

---

### Abstract

This article discusses a story about a Jewish-Christian interaction during a drought that appears in Peter the Chanter's *Verbum abbreviatum* and R. Judah the Pious' *Sefer Hasidim*. I suggest that the two authors had a common source, noting that Peter's version was earlier so that R. Judah might have based his story on an account based on Peter the Chanter's story, whether oral or written. Analyzing the tale, the article points to narrative strategies used by both authors and to what they can tell us about Jewish and Christian knowledge of each other's religious practice and belief in medieval Christian Europe.

### Keywords

Judah the Pious; Peter the Chanter; Sefer Hasidim; Verbum abbreviatum; Jewish-Christian relations; Medieval Germany; medieval France; Reims

Almost forty years ago, Joseph Dan examined stories from *Sefer Hasidim* (The Book of the Pious) written primarily by R. Judah b. Samuel (d. 1217)<sup>1</sup> and demonstrated that some of the stories in the book shared motifs and ideas with exempla written by Caesarius of Heisterbach (1180–1240), who

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors of *Sefer Hasidim* were the three prominent leaders of the medieval German Jewish pietist movement, R. Samuel b. Judah, the founder of the movement, his son—the central author of *Sefer Hasidim*—, R. Judah the Pious, and R. Judah's star pupil R. Eleazar B. Judah of Worms. It is impossible to determine which of these three scholars wrote the specific story this article will discuss, but I will follow the general consensus in scholarship and attribute it, like the bulk of the book, to R. Judah. See, Ivan Marcus, *Piety and Society. The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 136–143.

was roughly his contemporary.<sup>2</sup> Dan's work on the similarities between R. Judah's stories and those of Caesarius concluded by determining that there was a literary connection between the scholars, yet he asks: "what was the nature of that connecting link?" He answered:

There is no similarity whatsoever beyond that of actual facts and superstitions which form the stories themselves. These two writers undoubtedly used the same materials in their examples but used them for totally different ends. This fact seems absolutely to rule out the possibility that Rabbi Judah and Caesarius shared any written source for such a source would have left a deeper similarity both in the anecdotes they related and the conclusion they derived from it.<sup>3</sup>

The examples collected by Dan have been supplemented over the years, but on the whole, one can say that few have pursued the similarities between R. Judah's stories and those of contemporary Christians, and in fact scholars have been quick to emphasize the uniqueness of the Hebrew exempla in *Sefer Hasidim*, despite the small number of parallels that have been located.<sup>4</sup>

This article does not wish to question these larger conclusions but rather to present a parallel that has not been noted to date and suggest its significance for future research. *Sefer Hasidim* includes a story very similar to one that appears in the works of Peter the Chanter (d. 1197). Much like Caesarius of Heisterbach, Peter the Chanter was a contemporary of R. Judah, although his life parallels that of the earlier part of R. Judah's life, whereas Caesarius died after R. Judah.<sup>5</sup>

R. Judah was a scion of one of the most important Jewish families in the Rhineland. He lived in Speyer for many years and then moved with some of his disciples further east to Regensburg towards the end of his life.<sup>6</sup> *Sefer*

---

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Dan, "Rabbi Judah the Pious and Caesarius of Heisterbach: Common Motifs in their Stories," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22 (1971), 18–27.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 26–27.

<sup>4</sup> Eli Yassif, "The Exemplary Story in *Sefer Hasidim*," *Tarbiz* 57 (1988), 217–256, republished under the same title in his collected articles: *The Hebrew Collection of Tales in the Middle Ages* (Tel Aviv: Kibbutz Meuhad, 2004), 166–213 (Hebrew). Yassif lists these parallels on 174–175, n. 20.

<sup>5</sup> For a broad discussion of Peter the Chanter, see John W. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and his Circle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> For a biography of R. Judah the Pious, see the recent work of Joseph Dan, *R. Judah heHasid*, (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 2006) (Hebrew). For a précis of his biography, pages 11–13.

*Hasidim* presents a guide to those who wished to live their lives in a more pious manner and an alternative to many of the current behaviors of his time. The story examined in this article is one of hundreds of exempla that are meant to guide the “pious” or “pietists”<sup>7</sup> (*Hasidim*) to live a more pious life. As previous scholars have shown, the exempla in *Sefer Hasidim* instruct on mundane and minute issues as well as larger theological matters, many of which have not been explored to date.<sup>8</sup>

The exempla in *Sefer Hasidim* present a rare opportunity to scholars of medieval German Jewry since, on the whole, relatively few Hebrew stories have reached us from this period and many of those that exist are retellings of tales that appear in late antique texts such as the Talmud and different collections of Midrash.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the majority of R. Judah’s exempla do not have identifiable Jewish sources.<sup>10</sup>

In a section that discusses a number of cases in which Jews pray for rain or for the fulfillment of other needs, R. Judah tells the following story:

In one city they needed rain since the land had dried out as a result of the heat. The monks and priests and non-Jews came together and fasted and cried out to their gods for rain and rains did not fall. They said to the Jews: “Fast and pray to your god for rain, since you also need [rain]”. The city notables<sup>11</sup> said: Since you won’t [succeed]

---

<sup>7</sup> Ivan Marcus distinguishes between pious people and R. Judah’s followers, whom he calls “pietists,” in order to mark their belonging to a certain group, *Piety*. However, for the purpose of this particular story, which does not examine internal Jewish practice but pits the Jews against the Christians, I do not think this distinction is of great import.

<sup>8</sup> *Sefer Hasidim* has been the topic of much research over the past century. For a summary, see Ivan Marcus, “Introduction,” *The Religious and Social Ideas of the Jewish Pietists in Medieval Germany*, ed. Ivan Marcus (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1986), 11–24 (Hebrew); Peter Schäfer, “Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages: The Book of the Pious,” in *The Jews of Europe in the Middle Ages*, ed. Christoph Cluse (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), 29–41 and the forum of articles on the topic published in the *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96 (1), 2006 which came as a response to Haym Soloveitchik, “Piety, Pietism and German Pietism: *Sefer Hasidim* I and the Influence of Hasidei Ashkenaz,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 92 (2002), 455–493.

<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of stories from antiquity in their medieval context, see Rella Kushlevsky, *Penalty and Temptation. Hebrew Tales in Ashkenaz, MS. Parma 2295 (de Rossi 563)* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2010) (Hebrew).

<sup>10</sup> Yassif, “Hebrew Collection,” 177. Yassif has discussed the similarities and differences between the exempla in *Sefer Hasidim* and the popular Christian exempla of the period.

<sup>11</sup> The term used here, as in the passage cited below, is *hashuvei ha’ir*. These are the Jewish leaders of the community, as is evident in both passages. This term is worthy of further study; in the meantime, see Haym Soloveitchik, *The Use of Responsa as Historical*

with your prayer (*tiflah*)<sup>12</sup> [we will pray], but we will not [pray] with you for it is written: "Not reckoned among the nations" (Num. 23:9). Rather, first you pray, for it is written: "Though all the peoples walk each in the name of its gods, we will walk in the name of our Lord our God forever and ever (Micah 4:5) and it is written: "Prepare for it first, for you are the majority" (I Kings 18:25) and subsequently Elijah was answered and in this way they [the Jews] fasted and prayed and rain came down.<sup>13</sup>

This story echoes familiar themes in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Ta'anit*, where fasts and prayers for rain in times of drought are discussed. In fact, *Sefer Hasidim* includes passages that are almost verbatim quotations from Tractate *Ta'anit*.<sup>14</sup> However, in this case, this is not a rewritten version of an ancient story, with details adjusted to the medieval reality. This specific story does not appear in previous texts although some of its antecedents, such as the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel, are evident within the story told by R. Judah.<sup>15</sup>

---

Source (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shazar, 1990), 101-105, for a discussion of different ways of defining medieval Jewish authorities.

<sup>12</sup> On *tiflah*, a common Jewish term for Christian prayer, see David Berger, "A Generation of Scholarship on Jewish-Christian Interaction in the Medieval World," *Tradition* 38 (2004), 6, and see n. 18 below.

<sup>13</sup> בעיר אחת הוצרכו למטר כי נתייבשה הארץ מפני החום נתקבצו גלחים וכומרים וגוים יחדיו התענו וצעקו לאלהים בעד מטר ולא ירדו גשמים. אמרו ליהודים התענו והתפללו לאלהיכם על המטר כי גם אתם צריכים אמרו חשובי העיר לאחר שאתם לא תעשו תיפלה שלכם. אבל עמכם לא וכתוב "ובגוים לא יתחשב" (שמות כג: 9) אלא עשו תחילה אתם. וכתוב "כי כל העמים ילכו איש בשם אלהיו". אחר כך "ואנחנו נלך בשם ה' אלהינו לעולם ועד" (מיכה ד: 5) וכתוב "עשו ראשונה כי אתם הרבים" (מלכים א' יח: 25) ואחר כך אליה נענה. וכן אלה התענו והתפללו וירדו גשמים.

I have used the facsimile *Sefer Hasidim Parma H 3280*, introduction by Ivan Marcus (Jerusalem: Merkaz Dinur, 1985), #402, as well as the earlier edition published in *Das Buch des Frommen*, ed. Jehudah Wistinetzki, introduction by Jacob Freimann (Frankfurt a.M.: Wahrmann Verlag, 1924), #402. All references are to the Parma version, noted as *SHP*. For variants I have utilized the *Sefer Hasidim Database* at Princeton University, available online at: [https://etc.princeton.edu/sefer\\_hasidim](https://etc.princeton.edu/sefer_hasidim). The story of Elijah is also referred to as part of the debate concerning ordeals and for those who argued this was part of the culture of the Old Testament and a biblical miracle that confounds investigation; on this, see Michael Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders. The Development of the Concept of a Miracle 1150-1350* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishers, 2007), 12. This is the context in which Peter the Chanter discusses this story, although he does not refer to Elijah in this particular example.

<sup>14</sup> For example, *SHP*, # 400 and compare to BT Tractate *Ta'anit* 19b-20a, 24b.

<sup>15</sup> For further discussion of the Elijah story, see below, p. 41, n. 21 and p. 51.

The story R. Judah tells is characteristically sparse in details.<sup>16</sup> However it reflects a medieval Christian urban setting in the details that are provided. He tells of “the monks and priests and non-Jews” who came together during the time of drought, describing the varieties of non-Jews within cities quite precisely, distinguishing between clergy and laity. This enumeration of the different Christians, rather than noting simply “non-Jews,” provides a taste of medieval European life.

The story itself highlights the religious tensions between Jews and Christians, another feature of urban life in medieval Germany and northern France.<sup>17</sup> The language used when describing the Christians is insulting: as opposed to the Jews, the Christians do not pray, they “cry out to their gods;” their prayer is not called a prayer (*tefilah*) but rather idolatry (*tiflah*). These are both well known verbal insults to Christian religion often used in medieval Hebrew texts and as such represent a message the story teller, in this case R. Judah, is sending to his readers and listeners concerning the validity of Christian religion.<sup>18</sup> This specific idea is reinforced in what seems to be a lapse in the story. The Christians pray for rain and fail. They then summon the Jews who instruct them to pray again before the Jews try to invoke their God. In this way, the Christians are presented as failing twice, driving home the inefficacy of their prayers.

It is also noteworthy that the plot of this story, religious conflict that arises during the time of a drought, departs somewhat from traditional Jewish narratives. As Eli Yassif has noted, stories about rain in late antique rabbinic literature usually underscore class difference within Jewish society, whereas in modern times these stories highlight tensions between Jews and non-Jews. Moreover, he suggests that in modern versions the Gentiles

---

<sup>16</sup> Yassif, “Hebrew Collection,” 173–174.

<sup>17</sup> The stories addressed here are evidence of the urban setting in which they take place and are worthy of further analysis, which is beyond the scope of this article. Questions of how urban spaces produced and reflected Jewish-Christian tensions can be seen as part of a current growing interest in medieval urbanity. See the recent volume, Caroline Goodson, Anne E. Lester and Carol Symes, *Cities, Texts and Social Networks, 400–1500. Experiences and Perceptions of Medieval Urban Space* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 4–8 and 11–17.

<sup>18</sup> See Berger, n. 12, as well as Yaacov Deutsch’s discussion of insults regularly aimed at Christianity, “*Verzeychnuss... von den erschrecklichen Jüdischen Gottslesterungen* (1560): A Sixteenth Century Compilation of anti-Christian Practices,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 55 (2010), 41–61 and Elisheva Carlebach, *Palaces of Time: Jewish Calendar and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University and Belknap Press, 2011), 160–185.

are presented as challenging the Jews to elicit water from heaven, whereas in the ancient texts, the Jews do so of their own volition.<sup>19</sup> Yassif does not discuss medieval versions of stories about droughts, which seem to be relatively rare in comparison to late antiquity and modern literature.<sup>20</sup> However, it would seem that our story, which underscores religious difference, is related to what he sees as the modern characteristic of the tale rather than the rabbinic ones.<sup>21</sup>

Before continuing with the examination of the Hebrew story, let us turn to its parallel in the writings of Peter the Chanter. Peter was educated in the city of Reims and spent many years there as a canon in the cathedral. In his *Verbum Abbreviatum* (1191–1192), he discusses what he sees as the need to banish ordeals as a form of judgment and offers a number of stories in order to illustrate his position.<sup>22</sup> One of the stories he tells concerns the city of Reims during the time in which Albericus (d. 1141) was a master in the cathedral school in the city:

It happened once in Reims that there was an intolerable drought and harmful instability of the air. After having taken the relics and the reliquaries out [of the churches] for three days, believers of both sexes and of every profession and merit paraded them

<sup>19</sup> Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1994), 455–456 (Hebrew). The two tales he points to as examples of tensions between Jews and non-Jews, the story of Nakdimon Ben Gurion (BT *Ta'anit* 19b–20a; *Avot deRabbi Nathan*, ed. Menahem Kister (New York, NY and Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1997), Nusah a, chapter 7) and of Raba and King Shapur, (BT *Ta'anit* 24b), are not at all similar to this story. In his recent work on Safed, Yassif has pointed to the characteristics of these modern tales of rain in contrast to the ancient ones; see Eli Yassif, “In the Fields and Deserts”: Space and Meaning in the Legends of Safed,” *Cathedra* 116 (2005), 67–102.

<sup>20</sup> Yassif notes this story in *Sefer Hasidim* in a footnote and comments that it is a folktale. See n. 3.

<sup>21</sup> The exception to this rule is the Elijah story in the Bible, although one might ask whether the Ba'al prophets were actually foreigners or Israelites who chose to worship a foreign god. On the whole, medieval discussions of the Elijah story from Germany and northern France do not address Jewish-Christian relations using the figure of Elijah or this specific story. Instead, Elijah usually features as a figure who appears to righteous men and women who are in need of divine help. Elijah appears over twenty times in *Sefer Hasidim* but none of these passages relate to our story. The incident on Mount Carmel is mentioned in *Sefer Hasidim* in the context of internal communal strife between Jews, see # 1973.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of Peter's position see Baldwin, *Masters*, I: 323–332; idem, “The Intellectual Preparation for the Canon of 1215 Against Ordeals,” *Speculum* 36 (1961), 626–631.

around the fields and the city and not even a little cloud (or moisture) appeared.<sup>23</sup> Seeing their great affliction, a certain Jewish rabbi said: I submit that we will all be Christians if in less than three days I will not cause plenty of rain, if you allow us to carry around our parchment scrolls and Torah. Many believers said: this is good, it is good. Finally, the master Albericus said: God forbid that belief in Christ will be put in danger. If the Jew elicits water from the heavens by way of magic, by God's permission because of our sins or by the work of the devil, because it is written that even bad people have often produced miracles, thus belief in Christ can be altogether blown away, because then everyone would want to convert to Judaism.<sup>24</sup> Nor should they have dared to put our faith in danger for the profit of so many Jews.<sup>25</sup>

According to Peter, this event took place during the period when Alberic was master of the cathedral school at Reims (1120 to 1136), after which Alberic became Archbishop of Bourges.<sup>26</sup>

The Jewish and Christian narrations of this “event” include some of the same basic facts, with interesting differences. During a time of drought, the city's inhabitants tried to invoke rain from heaven, using the traditional means in both of their religions. R. Judah tells of fasting and prayer and does not mention the relics, but this is perhaps more similar to Peter's description than it appears, since relics were only taken out and paraded around the city after community members fasted and prayed.<sup>27</sup> Peter refers

<sup>23</sup> The diminutive is used twice: *modica* and *nubecula*.

<sup>24</sup> The parallel between this argument and that presented by the author of *Sefer Nizahon Vetus* concerning the ways Jews should refute Christian miracles is noteworthy. See David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the Middle Ages. Sefer Nizzahon Vetus* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1979), 210.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Cantoris Parisiensis, *Verbum Abbreviatum*, ed. Monique Boutry, CCCM, 196 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), I, 76, p. 505, lines 372–385. “Accidit quondam Remis intolerabilis ariditas et aeris noxia intemperies. Extractis reliquiis et capsulis, fecerunt per triduum fideles cuiuslibet sexus uel officii uel meriti aruambalia et amburbalia nec apparuit modica nubecula. Videns tantam afflictionem, Iudeus quidam archisinagogus ait: ‘Concedo ut omnes simus christiani, si infra triduum non dedero pluuias copiosas, si rotulum nostrum et thorath permiseritis nobis circumferre. Dixerunt plerique fideles: Bonum est, bonum est’. Tandem ait magister Albericus, ‘Absit quod fides Christi mittatur in periculum, si Iudeus de celo aquas eliceret arte magica, Domino permittente propter peccata nostra uel diabolo procurante, quia mali etiam leguntur sepe fecisse miracula, et ita fides Christi omnino posset exsufflari, quia omnes ad iudaismum conuerti uellent.’ Nec ausi sunt fidem nostram pro lucro tot Iudeorum periculo exponere. I thank Brigitte Meijns (Louvain) for her help with translation. See also Baldwin, “The Intellectual Preparation,” 630.

<sup>26</sup> Ludwig Ott, “Albericus v. Reims”, *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, (Munich and Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1980), 1:281–282.

<sup>27</sup> Concerning relic processions, see Thomas Head, “Saints, Heretics and Fire: Finding Meaning through the Ordeal,” in *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts. Religion in Medi-*

to the Torahs the Jews used to invoke God, a practice that is well known in Jewish sources. Each author presents the interaction between the Jews and the Christians differently, and, I would argue, in line both with their position in medieval culture and with the desire to emerge as victors from this encounter. In the Jewish version, the Jews are approached by the Christians, whereas in Peter's telling of the story, the Christians are approached by the rabbi. The result of this incident is similar, albeit reversed: the Jews tell of their success producing rain, whereas the Christians present themselves as rejecting the Jewish proposition and scorning the possibility that this kind of occurrence could provide a sign from heaven. Finally, the Jewish text casts doubt on the efficacy of Christian prayer, whereas the Christian text accuses the Jews of "black magic" with which they could elicit rain.

In many ways, these two stories follow what Elliott Oring has recently outlined using the term "rhetoric of truth." Both authors seem to be telling of a specific time and place and their accounts include many details that contribute to the believability, each author using what Oring has called the "belief language of their communities" and using devices to authenticate the stories they tell.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, as both stories were told in close proximity in northern France and the Rhineland, some of these strategies are shared and can be found in other Latin and Hebrew texts of this time period. By examining both stories together one can point to both the shared and differing strategies of the specific Jewish and Christian authors who represent their respective communities and the ways in which these "belief languages" were both similar and different.

What is the source of this story? As far as Peter the Chanter is concerned, one could assume, as some have, that the answer is straightforward. Peter was a student and master in Reims and he could have heard of, or perhaps even witnessed, this event, if it in fact took place.<sup>29</sup> R. Judah

---

*eval Society; Essays in Honor of Lester K. Little*, eds. Sharon Farmer and Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2000) 220–238; idem, "The Genesis of the Ordeal of Relics by Fire in Ottonian Germany: An Alternative Form of Canonization," in *Medieval Canonization Processes. Legal and Religious Aspects*, ed. Gabor Klaniczay (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 2004), 19–31. See also Peter Dinkelbacher, *Das fremde Mittelalter: Gottesurteil und Tierprozess* (Essen: Magnus, 2006), 57–58.

<sup>28</sup> Elliott Oring, "Legendry and the Rhetoric of Truth," *Journal of American Folklore* 121 (2008), 127–166, esp. 127–129.

<sup>29</sup> According to John Baldwin, it is not clear whether Alberic was Peter's master as he might have arrived in Reims too late to have heard him lecture, but he certainly knew his reputation. See Baldwin, *Masters*, I: 5, 153. Baldwin has argued that in light of the long



was not alive during the period in which Alberic was a master in Reims, but he lived during the years that Peter the Chanter was actively promoting his ideas concerning the ordeal and its problematic nature. Although Peter claimed the ordeal was immoral, as John Baldwin has argued, most of his proof came from the realm of experience and practice.

It is impossible to determine whether there was an actual event on which this story is based or not, but I would argue that it does not matter.<sup>30</sup> What is of import is that both authors believed this was a true story and presented it as such to their audiences.<sup>31</sup> The story rang true to its medieval listeners and as a result could be used by both Peter and Judah to promote their ideas. For the purposes of this comparison, whether fiction or fact, I am suggesting that R. Judah was familiar with this story through some local source, written or oral. During the years that Peter was in Paris arguing against ordeals, R. Judah was in Germany, first in Speyer, then in Regensburg.<sup>32</sup> Thus, one cannot point to when they could have been in contact, nor is it likely that R. Judah read the *Verbum Abbreviatum*, as we have no evidence of his ability to read Latin nor can we point to how such a text could have reached him. But the popular discussions of the issue of ordeals and the widespread fame of Peter's work, allowed R. Judah to come into contact with a written or, more likely, oral version of this story.<sup>33</sup> As this story is a version of a type of folk-tale, it was easily adaptable by its tellers yet at the same time, the appearance of this story in both the Jewish and Christian sources points to the cultural environment and repertoire shared by the authors.

In general, R. Judah's report of the story is terse, as is his style, without names or places, in contrast to the Christian telling.<sup>34</sup> This is much in line with the difference Dan pointed to between Caesarius and R. Judah as well.<sup>35</sup> Turning to the details in the stories, there are a number of aspects

---

period of time Peter spent in Reims, the Reims material should not disprove Peter's authorship as some have suggested. See, Baldwin, "Intellectual Preparation," 626, n. 80, 628.

<sup>30</sup> See, Oring, n. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Oring, "Legendry," discusses the basic assumption that legends are true and this is the case before us as well. For a more complex approach, see Dan, "R. Judah," 19.

<sup>32</sup> Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Tosaphists* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1984<sup>2</sup>), 237 suggests erroneously that R. Judah spent time in France.

<sup>33</sup> The *Verbum Abbreviatum* was well known in the thirteenth century and see Baldwin, *ibid.* n. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Yassif, "Hebrew Collection," 173–174.

<sup>35</sup> Dan, "R. Judah," 21.

worthy of further scrutiny. Let us begin with the reported event of a drought. Droughts, along with the prayers and fasts that resolve them, are common motifs in Jewish and Christian late antique texts, and this story could be a folk-tale that was adapted by Peter the Chanter and then by R. Judah the Pious, each for his own purposes.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, one could perhaps argue that each author conceived of this story independently without any relationship between them. I would argue that this is not likely in the context of twelfth century Northern Europe, whether in Reims or in the Rhineland, as drought was certainly not a common phenomenon and few stories discuss droughts.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, many of the modern Hebrew stories concerning drought either refer back to the reality of the Middle East, where drought is an ongoing issue, or reflect a Jewish-Muslim setting where drought was also a common occurrence.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, I suggest that the joint reference to drought is evidence of a common source, most probably R. Judah relying on an oral account of Peter, as I suggested above.<sup>39</sup>

In light of the relative abundance of rain in medieval Europe one understands the paucity of stories in medieval European texts that discuss praying for rain,<sup>40</sup> and the Jewish texts that discuss drought often refer back to the Talmud.<sup>41</sup> Scholars who have studied the medieval climate have noted the abundance of rain during what they call the “warm Middle Ages” in Northern Europe.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Christians and Jews, in Reims or in other

---

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, David Levine, *Communal Fasts and Rabbinic Sermons—Theory and Practice in the Talmudic Period* (Tel Aviv: Kibbutz Meuhad, 2001) (Hebrew); Teresa M. Shaw, *The Burden of Flesh. Fasting and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1988); Mary C. Mansfield, *The Humiliation of Sinners. Public Penance in Thirteenth Century France* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1995); William Chester Jordan, *The Great Famine. Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 156.

<sup>37</sup> I thank Lucia Raspe who suggested this perspective to me.

<sup>38</sup> Yassif, *Hebrew Folktale*, 455–456.

<sup>39</sup> Even if this suggestion is rejected, the similar details between the stories still allow for a comparison such as that which I suggest.

<sup>40</sup> Frederic C. Tubach, *Index Exemplorum, A Handbook of Medieval Religious Tales* (Helsinki: Akademiz Scientiarum Fennica, 1969), #1976, #3885.

<sup>41</sup> See n. 14.

<sup>42</sup> For the famines that did occur a little more than a century after Peter the Chanter's lifetime, see Jordan, *The Great Famine*, 7–9. For the warm middle ages, see Hubert Lamb, “The Early Medieval Warm Epoch and Its Sequel,” *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology* 1 (1965), 13–37; Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Times of Feast, Times of Famine: a History of Climate Since the Year 1000* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1971); Malcolm

urban centers, were probably not as concerned with rainfall as were late antique Jews and Christians who depended more heavily on agriculture. In light of the relative dearth of such stories in medieval Europe, it would seem that the parallel between the two stories points to a joint source and tradition.<sup>43</sup>

Taken together, I suggest that the stories are valuable for discussing some aspects of the ways Jews chose to present Christians and Christians chose to present Jews in medieval Germany and northern France. As noted above, R. Judah was familiar with Christian procedures in times of peril, in this case a crisis due to a drought. The “monks, priests and non-Jews” all gathered together to pray and fast. R. Judah referred to these three groups of people quite accurately. One can assume that R. Judah is describing a practice he himself saw on different occasions, as this was a regular occurrence for communities in cases of calamity, be it war, disease or climate and was a public ritual that was visible to all and there are records of such events in northern France and in the Rhineland during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>44</sup>

*Sefer Hasidim* has yet to be thoroughly mined for the details it contains of contemporary Christian practice. References to Christian practice are not frequent in the book, yet they are also not rare and are worthy of further attention. In fact, R. Judah was often accurate when describing other aspects of Christianity. Thus, for example, in a passage in which he described a Jew who converted to Christianity and then wished to return to Judaism, he gave the following advice:

And if there is an apostate and it is known to the city notables and the sages<sup>45</sup> in the city that he would gladly repent [return to Judaism] and if he runs away it would

---

K. Hughes and Henry F. Diaz, eds, *The Medieval Warm Period* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), 109-142, who argue that northern Europe was not much warmer.

<sup>43</sup> At the same time, it does not mean this was a real event. As stated above, that question is beyond the scope of this argument and is, without additional evidence, impossible to resolve.

<sup>44</sup> Mansfield, *Humiliation of Sinners*, esp. 248-287, examines practice in northern France. One of the author's central arguments is that all penance, and this included fasting and parading the streets with reliquaries, was public rather than private. For Germany, see Head, n. 26.

<sup>45</sup> חכמים. A *hakham* in *Sefer Hasidim* is usually the Sage who gives advice to his followers. The reference to both community leaders and sages here seems to suggest two kinds of leadership and see n. 11.

endanger the people [Jews] in the city, since they would say the Jews helped him escape, then he can fool the non-Jews [literally, steal the mind of the non-Jews] and say that he wishes to go to the grave [pilgrimage to Jerusalem, to the Sepulchre] and take a cross upon himself until he leaves the place where he is known and then remove it from himself there won't be grievance against the Jews.<sup>46</sup>

The different variations in the manuscripts of this story are evidence of the Jewish familiarity with Christian practice, since one manuscript has him going on pilgrimage to Jerusalem,<sup>47</sup> whereas another manuscript has him going on pilgrimage to a saint's shrine.<sup>48</sup> The suggestion in the text to the convert who wished to return to Judaism is that he should pretend he is going on a pilgrimage and leave the environment in which he was well known. Once out of his familiar surroundings, he could return to Judaism without endangering his own life or those of the other Jews in his town who could have been blamed for convincing him to return to Judaism. The acquaintance with Christian pilgrimage practices stands out in this passage.

A second example of Jewish familiarity with Christian practice can be found in another story concerning Jews who converted out of fear but wished to return to Judaism. R. Judah discusses the plight of women who converted:

During the time of persecution some were killed and some converted with the intention of returning to the Jewish religion when they would have the opportunity, rather because of their fear of the sword they converted. The women whose husbands were killed or who were single—some said lest the uncircumcised contaminate them. And they [the women] said that they wished to become priestesses (*komrot*).<sup>49</sup> But young

<sup>46</sup> *SHP*, #201: ואם יש משומד וידוע לחשובי העיר ולחכמים שבעיר שברצון היה חוזר בתשובה: ואם יברח תהא סכנה לאנשי העיר שיאמרו היהודים הבריחוהו, אז יוכל לגנוב את דעת הגוים שיאמר רוצה ללכת לשוחה ויקח עליו שתי וערב עד שיצא ממקום מכיריו ויסיר מעליו. ולא יהיה התרעומת על היהודים.

<sup>47</sup> Pilgrimage was often imposed on Christians as penance and was not always undertaken out of free volition, see Mansfield, *Humiliation of Sinners*, 115–116.

<sup>48</sup> Compare the Parma MS version to *Sefer Hasidim*, (Bologna: Defus Hashutafim, 1538), # 198, where the text mentions going to a “kedesh”—a saint. MS Bodleian Opp. Add. fol. 34, #87 mentions Jesus' grave as well whereas former MS JTS Boesky 45, #102 is censored. On Jews in saints' shrines, see Ephraim Shoham-Steiner, “Jews and Healing at Medieval Saints' Shrines: Participation, Polemics, and Shared Cultures,” *Harvard Theological Review* 103 (2010), 111–129.

<sup>49</sup> The word *komrot* is difficult to translate in the context of late twelfth and early thirteenth century social context. What was meant by this word, which literally translates as “priestesses”? Were these women who belonged to mendicant orders or were they women

females<sup>50</sup> they did not send there. Because they said if they escaped, they would not leave the young ones with them.<sup>51</sup> And others wore black clothes in their homes.<sup>52</sup> Since they [these women] said if they would be like priestesses, they wouldn't be able to easily escape. The gentiles said to them: Either you should be in the women's home (*komriya*)<sup>53</sup> or you should wear white clothes,<sup>54</sup> and they wore white clothes. Because they [the Jewish women] said, perhaps if we are in the *komriya* we will not be able to escape. And those who were wise among them [the women]<sup>55</sup> said, if they are contaminated against their will, by way of prostitution, it is not as grave a sin as those who are in the *komriya* who are guarded for a number of years so that they do not escape and who eat impure food and desecrate the Sabbath. But if the uncircumcised urge them to marry an uncircumcised man she will not be able to escape from her husband who guards her, so it is better that she be in the *komriya* and not be contaminated by the uncircumcised.<sup>56</sup>

---

who were pursuing penitential life but did not officially belong to an order? For the problem of defining these women, see John B. Freed, "Urban Development and the 'Cura Monialium' in Thirteenth Century Germany," *Viator* 3 (1972), 311-327; Anne E. Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns: The Women's Religious Movement and Its Reform in Thirteenth Century Champagne* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011). I thank the author for generously sharing her work with me prior to its publication.

<sup>50</sup> The term used here for young girls is "young females" and this is the way young girls are referred to in medieval Hebrew texts; see Elisheva Baumgarten, "Conceptions of Childhood: Education of Young Children in Medieval Jewish Communities," *Medieval Children and Childhood*, ed. Joel Rosenthal, (Sheffield: Paul Watkins-Shaun Tyas, 2007), 56-74.

<sup>51</sup> The idea seems to be that if these women tried to escape the convent, the young girls would not be able to run away.

<sup>52</sup> Some lay women who were especially pious wore black, as did beguines who lived in their homes. See Dennis Devlin, "Feminine Lay Piety in the High Middle Ages: The Beguines," in *Distant Echoes: Medieval Religious Women*, eds John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, 2 vols. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 183-196; Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Lester, *Creating Cistercian Nuns*.

<sup>53</sup> Once again it is hard to know if this is an official house that belonged to an order, or a house that belonged to penitent women. Many such houses existed in medieval urban settings as described by Lester, n. 49. But in light of the context, as I will explain, I have chosen to see this house as belonging to an order.

<sup>54</sup> Notably the Bologna edition reads the option of wearing white and being in a house as identical, something the medieval sources do not and this perhaps reflects the period in which the Bologna edition was printed (sixteenth century) when the option of living a holy life out of the order was not as prevalent.

<sup>55</sup> MS New York (former) JTS Boesky 45, #115 reads חכמות (wise women) in the feminine and suggests that the wiser women said this.

<sup>56</sup> SHP, # 262: יהודית לדת לחזור על מנת לשמור נשים ומקצתם נהרגו ומקצתם נשתמדו על מנת לחזור לדת יהודית. הנשים שנהרגו בעליהן או שהיו פגועות מקצתם היו אומרים כשיוכלו אלא מפני אבחת חרב נשתמדו. הנשים שנהרגו בעליהן או שהיו פגועות מקצתם היו אומרים

This passage shows the fascinating deliberations attributed to the Jewish women who, in this tale, are forced to convert. When searching for the best Christian alternative that would allow the women to revert to Judaism as swiftly as possible, an intimate familiarity with medieval female devotional patterns can be detected. The Jewish women are described as having three options: entering a *komriya*, a home for religious women belonging to an order; wearing black and leading pious lives in their homes, as some beguines are known to have done; or dressing in white, a characteristic of certain types of penitent women who almost always wore white as a sign of their penitent status and who were known as *filles-dieu* in France and by other names, such as *mulieres religiosae*, elsewhere.<sup>57</sup> Not only does this source explain the intricate differences between the available options, but it touches on one of the issues that would become cardinal in the thirteenth century discussions of these women—the ability to control these religious women in the different frameworks available for them. The lack of a female equivalent of the word *galah* (monk or priest), which featured above in our story concerning the drought, is evidence of the revolution of Christian female piety that was taking place in the early thirteenth century when *Sefer Hasidim* was compiled.<sup>58</sup> At this point these *mulieres religiosae* did not need to belong to an official home and often lived in their homes and wore white as a sign of their penitential piety. The intimate acquaintance of the Jews with these forms of devotion is not surprising, as many of the medieval cities in which Jews dwelled were also home to female orders, homes and beguinages.<sup>59</sup>

---

שם הערלים יטמאו אותם. ואמרו רוצות להיות כומרות. אבל נקבות קטנות לא שמו שם. כי אמרו אם יברחו לא יניחו את הטף מהם. ואחרות לבשו שחורות בביתם. כי אמרו אם יהיו ככומרות לא יוכלו מהרה לברוח. אמרו להם הגוים או תהיו בכומריא או תלבשו לבנים ולבשו לבנים. כי אמרו שם אם יהיו בכומריא לא יוכלו מהרה לברוח. ואמרו החכמים שבהם אם יטמאו אותם בעל כרחם דרך זנות אינו כל כך עון כאותם שבכומריא ששומרין אותם כמה שנים שלא יברחו ואוכלות דבר טמא ומחללות שבתות אבל אם הערלים ידחקו אותן להנשא לערל שאינה יכולה לברוח מפני הבעל ששומרת אותה מוטב שתהיה בכומריא שלא יטמאנה הערל.

<sup>57</sup> See n. 52.

<sup>58</sup> Anne E. Lester, "Crafting a Charitable Landscape: Urban Topographies in Charters and Testaments from medieval Champagne," in *Cities, Texts and Networks*, 137-139, describes such houses.

<sup>59</sup> Thus, for example, Mainz, a major Jewish center, was the home of one of the largest and best known Beguine groups during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; see Alois Gerlich, "Mainz," *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Munich: Artemis Verlag, 1993), 6:140-141. Speyer was the home of a number of orders and cloisters; see Kurt Andermann, "Speyer," *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, (Munich: Lexma Verlag, 1995), 7: 2097-2098; likewise,

These are but two examples of everyday Jewish familiarity with Christian practice that were not dependent on scholarly contact, but stemmed from mundane occurrences and meetings.<sup>60</sup> Returning to the story concerning the drought, we can see how this familiarity is even further complicated as it is not merely familiarity with the way the “other” society was ordered, but also a reflection of accepted Jewish practice. Praying and fasting in time of a drought or other crises was the standard Jewish procedure for centuries, as well as in the medieval period when Jews joined together and fasted in face of peril.<sup>61</sup> From this perspective we see not just a Jewish familiarity with what Christians do but a mirror image of what Jews themselves believe one should do during a time of drought. The antiquity of the practices of fasting and praying during times of drought is present in the biblical model R. Judah calls on explicitly in *Sefer Hasidim* and which Peter the Chanter refers to elsewhere in this very discussion of the efficacy of ordeals—the story of Elijah and the Ba’al prophets (I Kings, 18). In the Elijah story, as in both versions of the drought story, soliciting rain is not only dependent on divine favor, it is a testing of God’s preference—God hears and answers the prayers of the religions he has chosen.

R. Judah’s message is simple. The Christians prayed and fasted and they failed; the Jews insisted on separating themselves from the Christians and triumphed. This story drives home the point that Jews are distinct from their neighbors, even in a case where the problem, the lack of rain, is shared.<sup>62</sup> I would suggest that perhaps he is emphasizing this need for

---

Regensburg, the home of R. Judah, was the location of a number of different female orders; see Alois Schmid, “Regensburg” *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Munich: Lexma Verlag, 1995), 7:566–567.

<sup>60</sup> Much of the scholarship to date has focused on scholarly exchange and searched for channels of communication between scholars. However, these comments on Christian practice are evidence of contact in the realm of daily life that did not depend on scholarship or knowledge. For suggestions of such contacts between women, see Elisheva Baumgarten, “‘A Separate People’? Some Directions for Comparative Research on Medieval Women,” *Journal of Medieval History* 34 (2008), 212–228.

<sup>61</sup> For antiquity, see Noah Hacham, *Ta’aniyot Tzibbur beTekufat haBayit haSheni*, (MA Thesis, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1997). For the medieval period, see, for example, R. Ephraim b. Jacob of Bonn, *The Book of Memoirs (Sefer Zekhira). Penitential Prayers and Lamentations*, ed. With introduction and notes Abraham. M. Habermann (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1970), 33.

<sup>62</sup> One should note that this is not always R. Judah’s stance. For example, in a much-quoted passage he talks about how Jews and non-Jews share social obstacles, *SHP*, # 1301. The tosafo commentary on BT *Ta’anit* 21b, s.v. “*amru leh*” also discusses a case in which Jews and Christians fast together because of shared dangers.

separate prayer in order to distance his followers from the temptation of believing in Christian miracles—such as that which could have occurred, had the Christian prayers been answered—an issue that was of great concern to him and other medieval rabbis.<sup>63</sup> In this way, he was providing a “counter-narrative” to a popular local story, reversing the structure and the message of the story while building the story around common, shared beliefs.<sup>64</sup> This method of refuting and contending the beliefs of the majority in order to consolidate minority identity has been attested to as one of the “weapons of the weak” used by minorities in majority society at large and in medieval Jewish culture in particular.<sup>65</sup>

R. Judah’s story of the drought does not have a real conclusion—one does not know how the Christians responded to this success or what the implications of it were. Perhaps this was the farthest his imagination and, to some extent, audacity, could stretch, the telling of such a story in which the Jews triumphed. In other words, it is obvious that this is an “internal” Jewish success in which the Jews can delight within their community and that has no actual consequences even in the narrative. One could suggest that in the reality in which the Jews lived, one could not even imagine a continuation of this argument on more practical terms.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> For this temptation, see Judah Galinsky, ‘And if a Prophet or a Dreamer should arise from within thy midst and presented you with a Sign or a Miracle’: Different Approaches to “Miracles of the Christian Saints” in Medieval Rabbinic Literature” (Hebrew), *I.M. Ta-Shma Memorial Volume* (Alon Shvut: Tevunot Press, 2011), 195–219.

<sup>64</sup> For a discussion of such reversed structures, see Robert Bonfil, *History and Folklore in a Medieval Jewish Chronicle, The Family Chronicle of Ahima’az ben Paltiel* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 16–43, esp. 41–42; 52–53, and Israel J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 38–49.

<sup>65</sup> For the idea of counter-history in the medieval context, see Amos Funkenstein, “History, Counter-History and Narrative,” (Hebrew) *Alpayim* 4 (1991), 203–223; David Biale, “Counter-history and Jewish polemics against Christianity: The “Sefer Toldot Yeshu” and the “Sefer Zerubavel,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (1999), 130–145, and most recently William C. Jordan, “Exclusion and the Yearning to Belong: Evidence from the History of Thirteenth Century France”, in *Difference and Identity in Francia and Medieval France*, ed. Meredith Cohen and Justine Firnhaber-Baker (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), 15–24. In a broader context, see James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 17–44, who develops the idea of such a counter-history as the “weapons of the weak.”

<sup>66</sup> A similar suggestion has been made by Lucia Raspe in her discussion of the tale of R. Amram of Regensburg, Lucia Raspe, *Jüdische Hagiographie im mittelalterlichen Aschkenas* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 106–119.



As noted above, this familiarity of members of the minority culture with that of the dominant society as well as the limits they put on their imagination is fairly typical of minorities. But what can we learn if we examine Peter the Chanter's story in the same light—what does Peter know of Jewish practice? Not surprisingly, in contrast to R. Judah, Peter is unambiguous on what the Christians did. He states that they paraded the streets with their reliquaries. According to his story the Jews felt that the drought was their problem as well, and this was the impetus for their offer. Moreover, the Jews offered to come out with their Torah scrolls, promising to convert if they did not succeed. In addition, much like the Jewish tale, Peter's story has no real conclusion, since it ends without rain being produced. However, since the moral of the story from its author's point of view was that such ordeals are ridiculous, the last lines of the tale—"Nor should they have dared to put our faith in danger for the profit of so many Jews"—is the lesson the readers are meant to learn.

The reference to Torah scrolls paraded through the streets during calamities can perhaps be seen as Christian familiarity with Jewish practice. Communal fasts and prayer for rain are characterized by the taking the ark with the Torah scrolls out to public space.<sup>67</sup> Reims was not well known for its Jewish community in the twelfth century but there is evidence that a community existed in the city,<sup>68</sup> and Peter the Chanter himself tells of an exchange between a Christian master and a learned Jew there.<sup>69</sup> If not, perhaps this is knowledge Peter could have come by in Paris. However, we have no evidence that Jews regularly took Torah scrolls out on the streets of medieval cities. At the same time, this detail might not reflect actual Jewish practice. Rather it might be an assumption that Jews do what Christians do. Jews parade with their Torah scrolls like Christians parade with their relics and reliquaries.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Mishna *Ta'anit* 2:1; Levine, *Communal Fasts*, 66-96; Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy. A Comprehensive History* (New York, NY and Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 106-107.

<sup>68</sup> Henri Gross, "Reims," *Gallia Judaica*, ed. Simon Schwarzfuchs (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1969), 633-634. In contrast, see Norman Golb, "The Rabbinic Master Jacob Tam", *Crusades* 9 (2010), 57-67.

<sup>69</sup> Baldwin, *Masters*, I: 94.

<sup>70</sup> Christians often paraded with relics and Jews were surely aware of this, as they were of other parades; see Mansfield, *Humiliation of Sinners*, 152-154, and for Jewish awareness of Christian processions, see David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 44.

Peter the Chanter presents the Jews as volunteering their services to their neighbors and offering to convert if unsuccessful, a prospect that seems fantastic. Medieval Jewish communities evaded conversion, they did not volunteer to challenges that would force conversion on them. At the same time, in keeping with the limits of medieval imagination pointed to above, the Jews do not demand that the Christians convert, even in a legend such as this.

Altogether, this is not the aspect of the story Peter wishes to emphasize. His focus is on the response of the crowd, which, according to the story, saw this proposal in a favorable light; his message concerns the correct lessons they should learn concerning divine intervention and proof. He presents the Christian public as eager to perform this test and Albericus as the wise-man who knows how to proceed. The Jewish suggestion is proof of the dangers of the course the crowd seems to want to follow. The story serves his purpose of disowning the ordeal, with the Jews exemplifying the possible humiliation for Christians if the wrong course is followed.

One story in *Sefer Hasidim* with a Christian parallel added to the few known previously represents merely the beginning of a quest for a more complete list of parallels that may be able to shed further light on shared ideas and narratives as well as counter-narratives in medieval Europe. Yet, even without a full list, parallels such as these direct historians to the local contexts, both written and especially oral, in which these stories circulated and indicate the importance of reading these tales, whether Jewish or Christian in a joint context.<sup>71</sup> Both the stories and the dialogue between them provide evidence of some of the limits and the opportunities for conversation in the world within which both narrators lived. One can discern the shared and separate contours of each community's "language of belief" and their familiarity with each other's practices. Jews were familiar with Christian practice and Christians were somewhat, although to a lesser degree, familiar with Jewish practice, as befits a majority examining a minority.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, both stories are examples of the omnipresent religious tension that was part of urban life. Despite neighborly relations

---

<sup>71</sup> For a recent example, see Eva Haverkamp, "Martyrs in Rivalry: The 1096 Jewish Martyrs and the Theban Legion," *Jewish History* 23 (2009) 319–342.

<sup>72</sup> Scott, *Domination*, 33–36.

and concerns, even something like a drought, which affected all inhabitants of the city, regardless of religious affiliation, was presented as a contest of faith in twelfth-century Europe.

One cannot learn from this story as it appears in the *Verbum Abbreviatum* or in *Sefer Hasidim* about everyday medieval life without expanding our quest for more details about the practices described in the stories, such as praying, fasting, or parading with relics, all of which are beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, the narratives contribute to defining the contexts within which they were told and demonstrate the value of reading the stories together.<sup>73</sup> Jews and Christians spoke a common language of belief as far as the methods they used to counter calamity—they prayed and they fasted and took holy objects out to the street. Yet this same common language and practice included and reflected the divisive nature of the relationship between the communities and the strategies for maintaining an ideological and physical distance between them.

### Acknowledgements

This study is part of a project on medieval piety supported by the Israel Science Foundation, Grant No. 328/06. I wish to express my gratitude to Judah Galinsky, Rella Kushelevsky, Shulamith Shahar and Eli Yassif for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this article, to Anne E. Lester, as well as the readers for the journal for their helpful suggestions and critiques. The inception of this article was during my stay as a member supported by the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation at the School of Historical Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton (2008–2009) for which I am grateful. I thank Caroline Bynum and my medieval colleagues during that year—Brigitte Meijns, Julia Smith and Lynn Staley—for all I learned from them. Special thanks and appreciation to Giles Constable with whom I first raised the comparison addressed in the article and who kindly read and commented on the final product.

---

<sup>73</sup> The same holds true for the importance of reading Christian sources in light of local or parallel Jewish traditions. However, in light of the minority status of Jews in medieval Europe, it would seem that this inclusion of Jewish sources in their local context is vital for understanding the Jewish sources. For the importance of such readings, see Bonfil, *History and Folklore*, 41–42.

Copyright of Medieval Encounters is the property of Brill Academic Publishers and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.